



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Workshop

A Monthly Journal, devoted to Progress of the Useful Arts.

EDITED BY
I. SCHNORR AND OTHERS.

VOL. V.

N^o. 11.

ON THE ORNAMENTATION OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE.*

By JACOB FALKE.

I have already observed that the foundation of this style of ornament is a vegetable one, but other elements were introduced into it at an early period. At first, this was owing essentially to the artistic point of view, in order to mark certain principal points, and to make them prominent, as well as to heighten their interest by variety, and to give life to the scene by the addition of little birds or other animals. The idea was a natural one, to let the whole ornamental image grow as it were from one base, either from the foot of a column, or from the centre of a frieze, so that the branches or scrolls filled up the surface on both sides of it. But the models which the remains of antiquity offered contained similar elements far more numerous and diversified, and by no means so limited in application, and it was not long before they insinuated themselves into the ornaments of the early Renaissance with no particular view of artistic or ideal conformity, but solely for a mere desire, a morbid longing for ornament, if we may use the expression, which drew its elements from the whole circle of nature, and was delighted to find anywhere any pretty or graceful object.

The earlier masters made use of these motives with some reserve, introducing vessels of different kinds between the plants and flowers, binding tablets on the branches, and hanging chains in graceful curves to the flowers, or adding to them medallions, crests, or musical instruments. But soon there rushed in the whole apparatus of the old paganism, which in ancient art, where

the significance of every emblem was appreciated, had always a determinate meaning. In the Renaissance style however these altars, tripods, tragic and comic masks, Satyrs, Chimæres, Tritons and other sea monsters, were not only destitute of all meaning, but when found in combination with serious and sacred objects, with the vessels and appointments of christian worship, inappropriate and absurd. And in this respect, whether they were sepulchral monuments, altars, churches, or chapels, which were often covered with such subjects, it made no difference, nor apparently was there any suspicion of incongruity in introducing profane and even heathenish elements in the decoration of objects of sacred and holy destination. In this, the artists were only in harmony with the whole period, with Popes and Cardinals, Princes and Literati, in whose views and feelings, thoughts and belief, manners and ideas, heathenism and christianity, the worldly and unworldly were wonderfully amalgamated, on rather coexisted side by side, like two different worlds, between which there was no intercourse whatever.

This arbitrary combination of the most varied elements, so entirely unembarrassed by any regular train of thought, was speedily even outdone in the productions of the painters. Though this was only natural, since the artist with his colors could make use of many devices which in the plastic would be without effect, or from their littleness would injure the effect, yet an external impulse was required for it. I have already remarked that in the reception and cultivation of this kind of ornamentation, the painter's art tarried behind the sculptor's; at least it had to yield precedence to it in

* See page 145 *ante*.

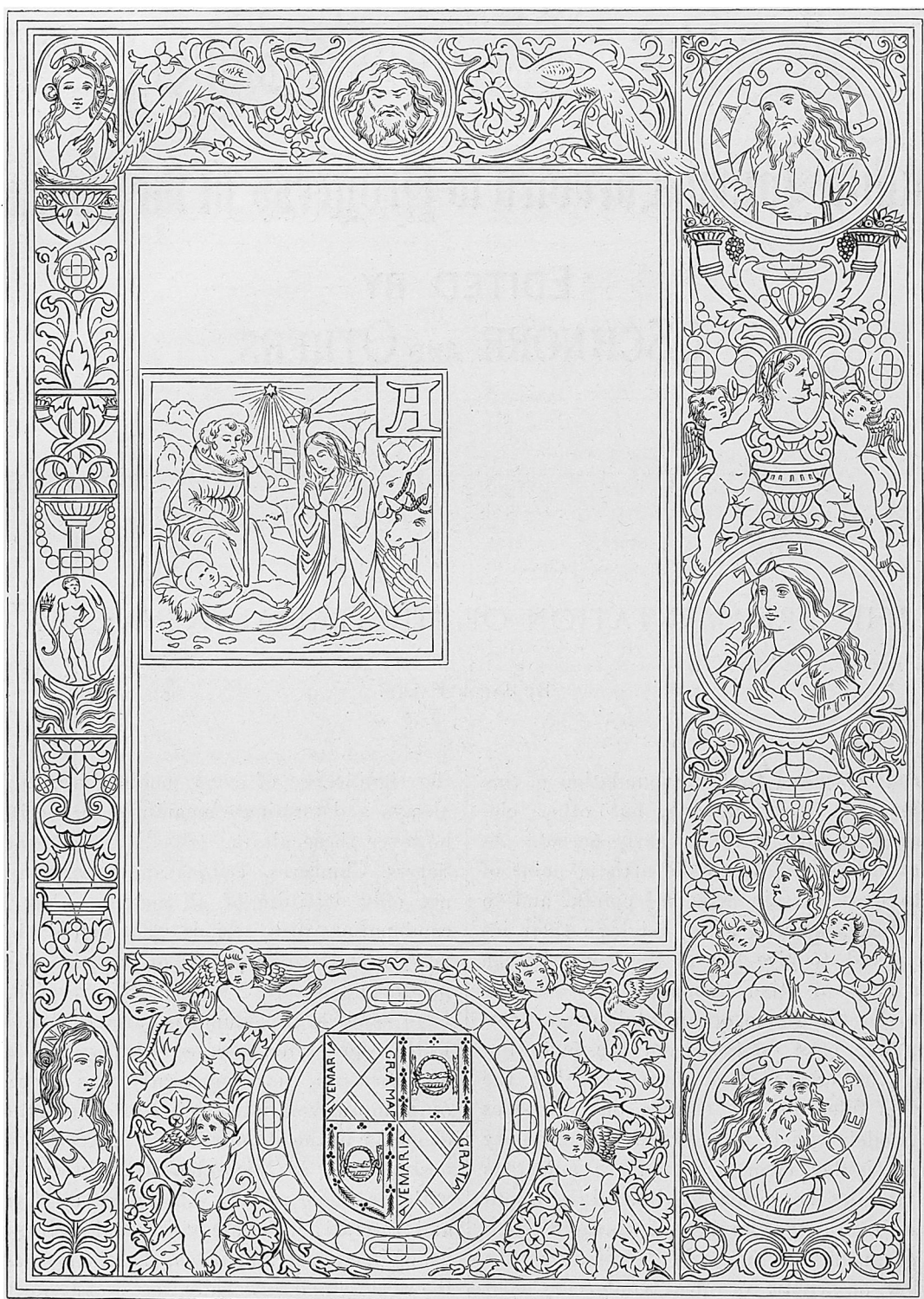


Fig. 6. Miniature Ornament.

point of time. And how dependent it remained for a long time upon the plastic art, may be seen from this, that even in the borders of the frescoes or panels, it imitated the plastic characteristic coloring, its designs being brown in brown, or even grey in grey. It found however its own peculiar style when representing its ornaments in color on a gold ground. Then the miniature arabesque of the parchment covered books went a step

further, taking up the whole range of plants with medallions and royal portraits, imitating antique Cameos placed between them, and lastly introducing amidst all this mixture the figures of naked children more frequently than ever, and embellishing the whole with a gay alternation of color.

The impulse of which I have spoken was given by the discovery of old painted mural decorations such as

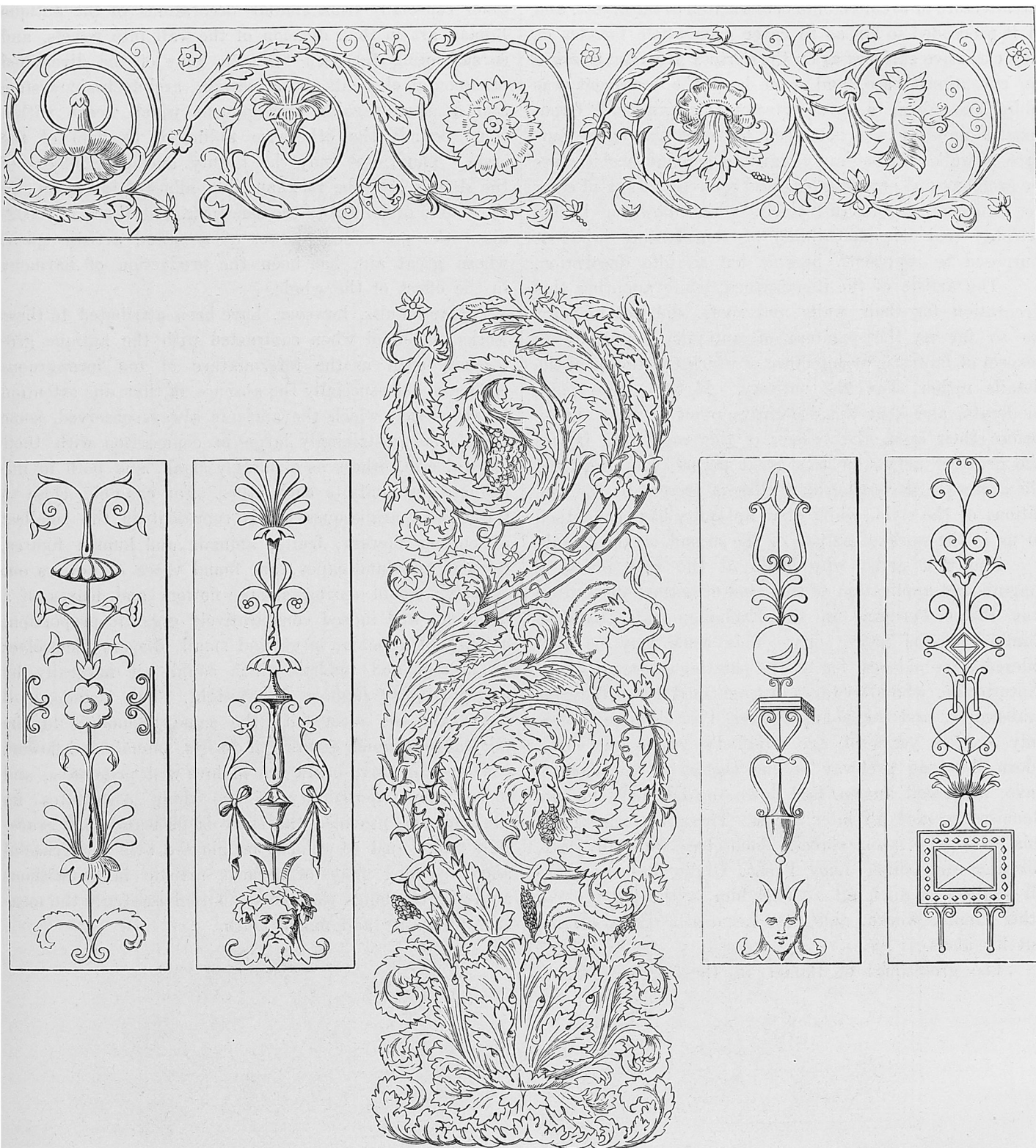


Fig. 7. Grotesque Ornament by Rafael, from the loggie.

were found in the baths of Titus about the year 1500, and which, as is well known, have received the name of "grotesques" from having been found in grottoes. Till then the style and essence of antique ornamentation was only known through fragments of sculpture. Nor were these decorative mural paintings of an entirely different kind either in their whole outward appearance or in their essentials. They employed the same means for

producing effect but could employ them in an infinitely more free and fantastic manner, and could superadd also other elements which were forbidden to the sculptor, such as landscapes and figures of every kind, of which indeed the painted decorations made abundant use.

One difference between these decorations and the plastic element was very important. The definite object of the latter was to clothe given surfaces and panels by the

architecture or architectonic construction of the object, and if it proceeded so far as to cover over whole façades or any extensive surfaces as on the Certosa at Pavia, this was an exceptional case, and even here the ornament was obliged to submit to the architectonic organisation. Ornamental painting was now seen to cover the entire surface of walls without any regard to genuine architecture or architectural organisation, and even by means of color to represent architecture itself, which however by its frivolity and its impossibility of representing what it purposed to represent, became but an idle decoration.

The artists of the Renaissance, while adopting this decoration for their walls and roofs, did not however go so far as the painters of antiquity especially in respect of fantastic architecture of which they adopted the details rather than the entirety. If they were more moderate, and kept the decorative point of view chiefly before their eyes, the reason of this was, that it was the greatest artists of this great period who practised the grotesque decoration and with it prescribed the conditions of the style, while what antiquity has bequeathed to us is the work of artists of the second or third rank.

The first artist who made at the very outset a magnificent application of this kind of antique decoration was Pietro Perugino in the Exchange hall (*Sala di Cambio*) of his native city. This work may be considered as a pioneer, for at the paintings were employed Pinturicchio, who afterwards distinguished himself by his arabesques, and the young Rafael, Pietro's pupil, then only sixteen years of age. Rafael's grotesques which adorn the long archway of the *loggias* of the Vatican have, as is well known, laid down the law both for the Renaissance and all later times. The great masters of this art, who soon spread themselves over all Italy, Giovanni da Udine, Luca Penni, Giulio Romano were all pupils of Rafael, all assisted him in the *loggias* and other similar works, and after his death partly carried out his ideas.

The grotesques of Rafael in the loggie (Fig. 7)

differ especially from similar decorations of the antique Roman art in their division of the wall into panels, and so subjecting the rich fantastic play of the diversified ornamental elements to a certain architectonic system and a more regular arrangement which keeps within some bounds the otherwise unlimited freedom of the style. Thus, not only the beauty and gracefulness of the details and the inexhaustible mine of invention are the source of delight to the spectator, but there is recognised the preeminent power of a grand artistic spirit, whose great aim has been the production of harmony in the effect of the whole.

Many faults, however, have been attributed to these works of Rafael when contrasted with the antique grotesques, such as the intermixture of too incongruous elements but especially the absence of that due attention to proportion which the ancients always observed, some objects being strikingly large in comparison with their natural size, others as strikingly small, and both in immediate proximity to each other. For example, close to the richest arabesques which represent in the smallest dimensions flowers, fruits, animals and human figures, temples and landscapes, are found vases of flowers out of which again spring stems, flowers and leaves of a different, and indeed comparatively gigantic proportion; and again animals, large and small, disport themselves on flowers and tendrils which could not naturally by any possibility support their weight. This is indeed all true. But we meet with the same anomalies in the fairytales, in which giants and dwarfs, animals and flowers converse together, bears are in love with princesses, and indeed the impossibility of the thing constitutes its great charm, provided the story is pleasantly and gracefully told. Just so we may be pleased with the graceful and charming play of Rafael's artistic fancy without applying to things that have no real existence the measure of reality and naked truth.

(The conclusion in our next.)